

# Access to a Voice



## Communications Planning for Civil Society and Community- Based Organisations

Prepared for the Voices of Reconciliation Project  
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# Module 1: Why a Communications Plan?

## ***Why plan?***

“Our organisation is voluntary or under-staffed or under-resourced, and it takes up all our time to run projects. We just don’t have time to initiate communication plans.”

Many organisations work intently and passionately on the projects in front of them to achieve the group’s objectives.

As a result, communications initiatives often happen in a scattered, spur-of-the-moment way. This is inefficient and can waste resources. Good planning allows you to focus your organisation’s resources on the actions that will benefit your work the most. A good planning process develops clear goals, concise messages and identifies the right target audiences.

## ***The Power of Communication Planning***

Communications planning can help to:

- Give your organisation a public profile
- Deliver a focused, consistent message
- Ensure everyone in your organisation delivers the same message and understands the impact you want to make
- Equip you with power to act quickly when necessary
- Fundraise
- Make your points accessible, digestible, and timely for policy discussions
- Raise awareness of your services with potential beneficiaries
- Mobilize and organize people
- Raise debate
- Educate about an issue
- Deepen your roots in your community or sector – local, regional, national or international
- Encourage partnerships
- Clarify your stance in the political arena
- Get the most of your budget
- Increase visibility – the possibility for even small, remote organisations to become known internationally
- Create a strong argument for funders to support your initiatives

There are strong examples of movements that had effective communications and media strategies as essential parts of their overall strategy. For instance, the anti-apartheid, anti-tobacco, representative democracy, child rights and women’s movements as well as many other global, regional, national and local social movements have all included communication strategies as a main--and often the central--part of their change effort.

The goals of a communication plan must emerge from, and be driven by, the goals of the organization overall. Therefore it is best to begin with an organisational plan.





## Module 2: Organisational Planning

### ***Vision***

Why does your organisation exist?

Perhaps you want to increase the role of women in the peace process, or to increase awareness of peace proposals. Maybe you want to run programs for children, or build a culture of tolerance and diversity in areas less supportive of compromise as a step toward ending the conflict.

How would you explain your organisation, in everyday language, to an interested passer-by?  
How would things be different once your organisation has achieved success in its work?  
How will people act differently once your organisation has achieved success in its work?

The answers to these questions form the foundation of a vision statement for your organisation. A vision statement summarizes the ideal future for your organisation.

Example of vision statement:

To achieve sustainable peace in Sri Lanka through socio-economic development with the active participation of war-affected women.

### ***Project Goals***

Every project that your organisation undertakes must have some clear and specific goals, and those goals must link back to the vision statement. Every project must, in some way, move your organisation closer to achieving its vision.

To develop project goals, consider the following questions:

- Why was the project created?
- How does it serve the goals of the organisation?
- Who is the target audience?
- What specific actions does your project hope your target audience will take? How will it change their behaviour?

Describe how this community (your target audience) will be different in one year, three years, or five years, after your project has accomplished its goals. (The more specific and concrete you can be, the more it will help you down the road.)

Example of a project goal:

Within five years, 90% of the adults in our town will have literacy and numeracy skills, and will have easy access to appropriate reading materials. Employment levels amongst previously illiterate adults will have increased.

## ***Project Objectives***

Objectives emerge from goals. They are the targets you need to achieve in order to reach the goal. Objectives are often short-term while goals are long-term.

The best objectives are SMART:

- Strategic (should link to your project goal)
- Measurable (should specify a number of individuals who will be affected by the activities)
- Achievable (Something that can be done with the resources available)
- Realistic (the objective is concrete)
- Time-bound (there is a time frame for change)

Try to develop between one and four objectives for each of the project goals.

Example: this goal is clear but not concrete or measurable:

Educate the general public about the risks of diabetes and about lifestyle changes as a way to prevent the disease.

To make this goal concrete, measurable and achievable, be more specific:

Reduce the diabetes prevalence among 35-45 year-old men in Colombo by 10%, within three years.

## ***Situational Analysis***

A situational analysis allows you to take a broad view of other projects, initiatives and events that are happening both outside and inside your organisation that might affect your ability to achieve the project goals and objectives.

Situational analysis assesses what is happening and evaluates whether or not it will influence your project.

For example: if your organisation is campaigning on behalf of paddy farmers against privatization of water, you might ask the following questions in your situational analysis:

- Where does your organization fit compared to other ones working on this issue?
- What is the current policy environment?
- What is public awareness of the issue?
- What core values are most relevant to this issue?
- What are public attitudes on the issue?
- Are there particular groups of people that care about this issue?
- Has there been any media coverage of this issue? How much, and what quality?

- What magazines, newspaper columnists, or local radio hosts do you know of who may have an agenda or motivator that supports your issue? What outlets and reporters could offer the strongest opportunities?)
- Who are your opponents? Whose voices speak against your organisation's on this issue?
- What resources does your organisation have for this project?
- What are your internal strengths and weaknesses?
- How is your organisation perceived by the public, by media and by policymakers?

## Module 3: Strategic Communications Plan

A communications plan is a framework for communicating within your organisation as well as between your organisation and your external audiences. It is much more than a promotional or media plan.

Developing a communications plan can take as little or as much time as you wish. This module is a guide to the planning process.

The core of communication planning is about

- Message: what to communicate
- Audience: who to communicate with
- Method: how to communicate
- Timing: when to communicate
- Responsibility: who will communicate

Although it is possible for one person to create a communication plan, it is likely to be much more effective if many people in your organisation do this work together. As a result they will be more prepared, engaged and informed about how best to communicate.

Here is a sample format for the communication plan.

Who do we need to communicate with? (audience)	Why do we want to reach them? (link to project or organisation goals)	What about? (message)	How? (method)	When?	Cost	Who is responsible?	How will we measure success?

An important question is “Can our organisation cope if we achieve the success we seek?” A communication plan should include how your organisation will handle any extra demands on your organisation, and your organisation should try to anticipate these.

### ***Write your plan in plain language***

To be most effective, the communication plan should be clear and direct – free of jargon. Plain language is more effective than academic or creative writing styles.

- Use action-oriented verbs and sentences that begin with subjects
- Write about your plan’s elements in terms of benefits and outcomes. Strike a balance in favour of giving readers reasons to support your ideas rather than just informing them about the details.
- Avoid complex sentences; split long sentences in two so each sentence contains only one idea.

## Module 4: Define your Audience Groups

Your audience groups (sometimes called a target audience) are the people you want to inform, challenge or influence.

The best way to effectively use a small budget is to target your message to the people who are most likely to respond. Broad-based communication materials are not as effective as materials tailored for a specific group.

Ask these questions to learn more about your audience groups:

- What is their age?
- What gender are they?
- Where do they live?
- What is their income?
- Are they married? Do they have children?
- What is their primary language at home?
- What is their religious practice?
- What are their values?
- What motivates them to act?
- What do they know about your issue?
- What is this audience's main source of information? Who do they listen to? Who do they respect?
- Why is this audience important to you?
- What do they offer to you?
- What, precisely, do you want them to do?
- Why will you be important to them?
- What benefit will they gain?
- What do you offer them?

An example of targeting different audiences: 'Raja Rata' Community Development Center in Kekirawa, Polonnaruwa District, uses street drama as a strategy for delivering messages about conflict resolution. They have one version for adults, and another version for children



## Module 5: Define your Message

You've defined your audience groups. Next ask: what do we want to communicate to them? What is our message?

Think about your message as the impression you want to leave with your audience, not as a tag line or a slogan.

In general, there are four different types of messages. Each type corresponds to a Stage of Engagement:

- Awareness
- Attention
- Judgment
- Action



### **Awareness Messages**

- Awareness messages are designed to bring your issue to the attention of your audience, or to get your issue onto the public agenda.
- Base your message on values that the audience and your organisation have in common
- Use imagery
- Tell a story: give the audience something interesting to tell others

### **Attention Messages**

- Attention messages create an informed audience.
- Tell people something new
- Use facts; give people a reason to repeat your message
- Provide sources: Give people a reason to believe
- Repeat your message: Help people remember

### **Judgment Messages:**

- Judgment messages persuade your audience to support a position.
- Link the impacts directly to them
- Talk about the benefits for them
- Link your position to their values
- Mention the names of others (who are familiar to your audience) who share your position

### **Action Messages**

- Action messages move people to action.
- Make action convenient: take advantage of existing behaviours
- Give specific direction: say how to be part of the solution

- Inspire: show them what success looks like

Here are some additional things to think about when you are developing messages:

- Hearts over minds: Most people form opinions and attitudes and choose behaviours using their feelings first and their intellect second. Use emotion to tell the story of how your agency makes a difference.
- Your mission statement should not be part of your message. Most are too broad and generic to make for powerful messages, and they don't usually elicit emotion.
- Emotion drives donors to give. If what they read or hear inspires emotion, then they will find the rational reasons necessary to justify their desire to give.
- People pay attention to messages that correspond to the values they hold. Good messages seek "responsive chords" in the audience. Consider a message that leads with values and is supported by facts.
- Don't preach or lecture. Work with your audience's current belief system. Do not try to recreate their beliefs.

Here is an example of a good message

A youth group in Sri Lanka decided that since peacebuilding was their key message, they wanted to link their message to the strongest motivator for their audience – to Buddhist values. Their message linked a peacebuilding campaign to a reminder: 'Lord Buddha said that peace is most important.' Their Tamil community too could be

Your message should also be bite-sized and deliver benefits to your audience:

**Bite-sized:** How many things do you want the audience to do? Which is most important? What comes first? Start with what you want to achieve, then define the steps to get there. No guessing; no leaping. Give your audience bite-sized tasks they can do easily.

**Deliver benefits:** Your organisation's issue contains a built-in benefit for the audience, for example peace, environmental protection, safe steady water supply, support for women who stand up against domestic violence, etc. Your message is more likely to succeed if that benefit is communicated clearly and repeatedly.

At the same time, be aware that the audience is also considering the costs associated with achieving that benefit. These costs might be time, effort, the risk of embarrassment or disapproval, inconvenience, the need to form new habits or behaviours, and so on.

If the costs outweigh the benefits for an individual, the perceived value of your message will be low and it will likely go unheeded. However, if the benefits are perceived as greater than their costs, the chances are greater that the individual will receive and act on your message.

It's important to learn what people in your audience value and what they consider to be a cost and a benefit so that you can tailor your message accordingly.

## ***Why now?***

Effective campaigns are built on decision points.

Many social issues compete for people's attention, and people can easily feel overwhelmed, issue-fatigued, and want to tune out.

The conflict in Sri Lanka, for example, has been going on for a long time. Why is today the day that people should listen to a message about engaging in the peace process? What is special?

Organisations often assume a level of interest in their issue that simply isn't there in the audience. They assume that the audience cares about the issue as deeply as they do, when in fact the audience may be worn out from hearing messages about the issue from other sources.

You need to give the audience a reason to pay attention now. Brainstorm possible issues, events or anniversaries that could push your issue into the spotlight. Look for the 'hook'.

Take note of external or internal events you might want to connect with, but also look for ones you may want to avoid.

## ***Tone and Language***

Take care in choosing the words in your message. Make lists of language you want to capture or embrace and language you want to avoid. For example:

A community-based organisation in Sri Lanka wants people to get more engaged with environmental concerns. They decide to *capture* language to do with family, and protecting the environment for the audience's children. They also want to *capture* language to do with pride in the beauty of Sri Lanka's natural environment. On the other hand, they decide to *avoid* any tone of shaming or making their audience feel guilty for environmental apathy. They also decide that they want their message to *avoid* any feeling of apocalyptic doom.

## ***Stay Simple***

What change will your project bring about? Whose lives will be affected? How will it be good for society as a whole? And once it's completed, where does it go from there?

Within your organisation you may have very detailed and complex answers to these questions. However your message to the audience must be simple and clear rather than complex and hard to follow.

## ***Message Chart***

Use this chart to help your organisation develop high-quality messages:

Criteria	How to Capture in Messaging?	What to Avoid in Messaging
Audience values		
Benefits of our project		
Language/words to use		
Tone/feel		
Other		

## Module 6: Branding your Organisation's Identity

How do people in your community, or other organisations in your sector, perceive your organisation?

How different is this from how you see yourselves?

If these perceptions are quite different, your organisation may want to look at your branding.

A brand is the sum of your audiences' feelings & beliefs (conscious & unconscious) about you:

- Products/services (what you do)
- Promise (what you deliver, and how)
- Uniqueness (how you are different from other organisations)

A strong brand is:

- Clear: expresses your organisation's vision, promise and values
- Relevant: Resonates with your audience(s)
- Consistent: permeates all communications, internally and externally
- A strong brand helps you weather any negative media coverage, and is more convincing to a donor who is considering where to put their funds.

### ***Tangible and Intangible Elements of a Brand***

Your organisation's brand is expressed in both tangible and intangible ways:

Tangible	Intangible
Name	Vision and mission
Logo	Values
Tagline or slogan	Reputation
Messages and stories	Positioning

The tangible elements include the way your organisation's name is printed, what image your logo projects as a symbol of your organisation, your slogan, the colours you use and the meaning given to them, the style of your communications materials or processes, even the kind of paper you choose to print on.

The intangible elements build your civil society organisation's identity, and include whether you're an NGO or community-based organisation, what sector you work in (poverty relief, peace, agriculture, gender equality etc) your reputation, how you work with communities and your reliability.

Brand-building is as important for nonprofits as it is for corporations. The benefits are the same: having an organisation that is understood and attractive to a group of people most likely to support it with their resources.

Brand consistency is important. Your words, action, and images should all support the philosophy of what your organisation wants to stand for. Try to identify any unintended messages your organisation may be sending.

Look at a newsletter or flyer you produce. Consider for a moment only the photos, typefaces and maybe a headline. Would someone who doesn't read the text get the right idea about your organisation? Are there any conflicting messages?

A style guide is a useful way to ensure brand consistency. It specifies usage of your organisation's name, logo, slogan, colours, and so on to ensure that you project an image of unity and purpose.

## ***Slogan***

A slogan should capture your values, vision and mission in some way. Corporations use slogans to encourage consumers to associate values with their products: a fizzy drink is connected to friendship, a brand of clothing is connected to achieving dreams. It's best to have one main slogan, and to keep it to as few words as possible.

**Example: Free Media Movement**  
**"For media freedom, responsible journalism and professional solidarity"**

A good slogan should be:

- Short
- Memorable
- Descriptive
- Emotional

Have a look back at your organisation's vision and objectives. What can you use to help you to develop your identity, a main message, a slogan, maybe even a logo?

## ***First Steps***

First steps toward brand-building:

1. Know who you are
2. Know how you are perceived
3. Know what your organisation's goals and objectives are
4. What is your reputation with your beneficiaries and other stakeholders?
5. What services are you clearly identified as offering?
6. Does your organisation have a unity among the symbols, look and style the material created and distributed on behalf of your organisation?



## **Module 7: Communication Strategies**

### ***Behaviour Change Communication***

Development communication, or social change communication, used to mean mainly delivering messages by providing information and materials to a population. By informing people quickly with pamphlets and posters, it was hoped that their behaviour would change.

But development communication research has shown that awareness or knowledge does not necessarily lead to action. It is only one ingredient in the larger process of behaviour and social change.

Behaviour change communication has proven to be more effective when combined with advocacy and social mobilisation strategies.

### ***Advocacy***

Advocacy is directed at people who have the power to influence policies and allocate resources. Even at a local level, organisations can advocate for an issue and influence a decision-maker. The key is gathering, organizing and transforming information into persuasive arguments for specific policy changes. The goal is to influence leaders and decision makers at different levels.

### ***Social Mobilisation***

This strategy involves getting people involved with your cause. It may involve media, but may not. It involves identifying other organisations, groups, companies, networks, groups, and communities who can contribute with time or money. Social mobilisation builds from community action.

Depending on your goals and objectives, and the nature of your project, you may wish to allocate your resources to these three strategies unevenly.

For example, if your goal is to provide safe drinking water for a community, you might want to put more emphasis on advocacy and social mobilisation and less on knowledge and awareness. (People in the community are likely well aware of the water problem; they need help and direction in solving it.)

Another example: if your goal is to educate people about the impact of individual lifestyle on diabetes, you would likely put more emphasis on knowledge and awareness and less on advocacy or social mobilization, since diabetes isn't a public policy issue.

## **Communication Tactics and Channels**

There are many, many things you can do and communication vehicles you can use to get your message to the intended audience.

Here are a few examples:

- Media relations: news release, letter to the editor, journalist education
- Events: special event about your issue, display at an event by a partner organisation, speeches
- Printed materials: brochures, pamphlets, posters, banners, signage
- Advertising: radio, television, billboards, newspaper, magazine
- Online: website, e-newsletter, blog, online forum

You can choose as many or as few communication vehicles as your resources (human and financial) can afford. Begin by asking yourself, “What do we know about how our audience seeks information? What do we know about how they share information?”

### **Advertising**

This includes paid advertising on TV, radio, billboards or other outdoor ads, newspaper or magazine ads, and website ‘banner’ ads.

Newspaper ads can be expensive, but if an issue, policy or event is of great importance, you can consider contacting other organisations with similar concerns, who may be willing to share the costs and sign an agreed-on statement to make for a stronger voice.

DAILY NEWS FRIDAY NOVEMBER 24 2006

**Daily News**  
**Events**  
**Eliminating violence against women**  
**NOVEMBER 25 TO DECEMBER**  
10: The public will meet to express their solidarity to end violence against women at the Sathutu Uyana Car Park.  
The walk against Violence Against Women will commence at 9.00 a.m.  
The day will begin with a walk against violence against women followed by a public event, exhibition, drama and interaction sessions, games etc., focusing on different aspects of gender-based violence and women's rights.

In a local paper where ads are not so expensive, a civil society organisation may be able to find a donor or a business sponsor willing to pay for a specific ad on an issue of concern to them. The above ad ran in a large Colombo paper:

## **Publicity**

This is the use of unpaid media communication to help build audience awareness and affect attitudes positively (newspaper, radio or sometimes even TV news, events listings, feature articles, magazine profiles, talk radio, TV talk shows (e.g. Good Morning Sri Lanka), TV interview shows (e.g. Nothing Personal), radio call-in shows, community radio. You can read more about this in Module 8: Media Relations & Media Tools.

## **Entertainment**

You might consider providing entertainment combined with education messages. Examples of this include producing a radio program in your community (through InterNews; see Module 8), folk dramas, songs or games.

## **Promotion**

Promotion offers added incentives to encourage an audience to think favourably about a desired behaviour or to take an intermediate action designed to lead them toward a desired behaviour. Examples include contests, free samples, sweepstakes, merchandising.

An example of promotion might be a children's charity running a contest for kids to submit art on the theme of conflict and peace in Sri Lanka, that will conclude with a public art exhibit. Perhaps a newspaper can be persuaded to run ads for free, in exchange for having their logo on all contest materials, being the only newspaper sponsor, and securing commitment to be the first print publication to publish the winning pieces. A local company may be able to donate a prize or funds for the winners.

Promotion may use mass media, but could use other communication channels.

## **Beyond the media**

Beyond using mass and small media, interpersonal and participatory community-based media are indispensable channels to lead communication efforts aimed at improving or changing behaviours and in sustaining such behaviours.

These break down into two categories: things you do and things you produce. These are listed on the next page.



Things you do	Things you produce
Community radio Door-to-door canvassing Events to call attention to a desired behaviour (news conference, celebrity appearance, award presentation, research presentation, parade) Face-to-face presentations Group channels (social, religious functions, schools, community meetings, public gatherings) Local folk media (music, puppetry, drawing, dance, storytelling, traditional art forms) News conference On-line faxing Participatory drama Peer education Phoning/telemarketing Popular theatre Presentations to policy makers Rallies, demonstrations Talk radio/TV call-in shows	Action alerts Action plan of desired policy change Audio cassettes Briefing kits CDs Coffee-table books Columns in the newspaper Direct mail Display tables Educational or briefing videos Feature articles IEC (Information, Education and Communication) Materials Leaflets Letters to the editor New media (websites, blogs, e-newsletters, e-cards, online chat rooms) Newsletter articles Newsletters Op-ed pieces for newspapers Petitions Postcards Public service announcements - PSAs (radio, TV) Quick message media (stickers, banners, billboards, graffiti, T-shirts, email) Signs Slide-shows Small format community media (booklets, flyers, posters, banners, brochures) Spokespeople

Use innovative strategic and tactical approaches. There are always new possibilities for communication channels!

## Module 8: Media Relations

### *How Editors Choose the News*

What's your news angle?

News does not occur in a vacuum. It affects our personal lives, work, and way of thinking. How does your project affect your community? Whose lives will be affected by what you do? How does your project reflect upon what's happening in society? Quite simply, why does anyone need to know about your project? Why should they care?

Develop a sense of urgency about your project. This is not always easy for a small community-based organisation with limited resources. But it can mean the difference between coverage and no coverage, or between free media coverage, and paid advertising.

### *Is it new?*

The most important criterion for news is that it is **new**. News is about change, trends, new developments, events that are different from the norm, information that people previously didn't know.

Ask yourself:

- What has changed in recent days/weeks/months related to the issues on which my agency works?
- What have I heard about changes that are coming in the future?
- What trends are affecting the people/issues we work with?
- What have I heard from my staff that made me say, "That's interesting, I didn't know that."?
- What's going on in the community?
- What is my agency doing now that's different from the past?
- What research have we conducted recently?

News stories can continue over time. In the minds of editors, different stories deserve different amounts of coverage, both in terms of the space/time allotted to them in an edition/program, and in terms of the frequency that the story will be covered.

An ongoing issue that is sufficiently interesting and complicated that it will be covered several times while it continues to develop is said to have “legs”.. Some stories are so hot that the media give them daily coverage. Ask editors how much coverage your issue merits and try to make your media releases and phone calls fit within this time frame.

Be selective with your news releases and send them out only when a major event happens. Editors can respond negatively toward organisations they feel are pestering them with too-frequent news releases and requests for coverage.

Here are a few ways to give your story “legs” and the potential for ongoing coverage:

- Offer fresh angles. For instance, if it's an environmental campaign, suggest stories that look beyond strict environmental issues: how are local communities affected? What about tourism? Educational opportunities?
- Offer little "nuggets" of news that can generate a little coverage. Did you find an interesting document in a freedom of information request? Has a politician shifted ground slightly on your issue?
- Suggest different approaches to the story: Make a campaign leader available for a profile story. Publicize the results of a poll you conducted. Get a high-profile person to visit. Organize a public debate, and invite the media. Offer an exclusive in-depth interview with a researcher.

## ***Is it relevant to your audience?***

Issues and events that are relevant to people's lives qualify as news.

Ask yourself:

- How does your agency's work affect people's lives?
- How are people in your community affected by the issue?
- What tangible impact does this issue have on people?

Editors frequently look for stories about events/issues that have an impact on the lives of ordinary people. They want real people as “characters” in stories, not just officials and spokespersons. Identify people among your clients or supporters who are willing to tell their story to the media.

Talk to the media about your work in terms of the benefit it has on the community. Show the media how and why your issue matters to real people.

Editors also look for stories that are close to home. If you are a local agency, this will be to your advantage with the local media.

## ***Is It Interesting?***

Editors look for stories that they believe their readers or viewers will find interesting. Usually these are stories that have dramatic, inspiring or challenging components to them. They are stories about real people, not facts and figures. They are stories about cause and effect, action and reaction, a day in the life, or triumph over adversity.

Think about and brainstorm how to turn your issue into a compelling human interest story. Here are a couple of ideas you might explore or questions you might ask to draw out a storytelling element from your organisation:



- Profile of a woman whose son has returned home, injured; the struggles they face with integrating him into family life. Who could we profile?
- Several women (with connections to one CSO), all who lost husbands or children in the conflict. How is a typical day in their lives different than it was before their loss? (You likely would need several women willing to discuss this on camera)

Who in your community/CSO would you most describe as both knowledgeable, and animated in their speaking?

Who in your community/CSO has a personal story to tell that you think most movingly shows why your CSO needs to exist? Are they willing to tell their story to the media? What kind of 'talker' would this person be, as an interviewee?

## ***Think about pictures and sounds***

Some stories are primarily visual, and must be told with compelling photos or video. For example, a story about poor water quality in a community will have a greater impact if viewers can see the water, the pumps, and the people who live with this problem.

Among the most boring television has to be 'the talking head': an interview with little visual potential, no interesting background, no supporting images that can be added to the story, just an interviewee talking on and on.

Some TV newsroom managers have been known to tell journalists that their stories should be so picture-driven, that viewers should be able to tell what the story is about with their TV's sound turned off.

Other stories are well-suited to radio if there are interesting sounds to go along with them. Radio allows us to make the images in our minds based on the words and sounds we hear.

Excellent quality photos make a story more attractive to a newspaper or magazine editor.

Once you have decided on the stories you want to tell, brainstorm some interesting video shots, photos and sounds that will make the story appealing to all types of media.

Example:

Community Trust Fund in Kekirawa runs a campaign on land mines education. The organisation has a large door-sized transportable display laid out flat as an exact replica of a land mine clearing site. There is a toy ambulance, ribbons section off the whole area into squares, and rubble covers the surface. A photo in a newspaper becomes a lot more interesting with an exhibit like this demonstrating a concept. A photo in a newspaper usually then becomes a lot more likely. This organisation used to have a replica land mine field laid out on the ground outside their office.

## ***Finding Media Opportunities: Consuming Media Differently***

As you embark on media relations for your organisation, start reading more newspapers, watching more TV and listening to more radio. As you read and watch and listen, have your mind tuned for opportunities.

Talk amongst your friends, family and colleagues about various media outlets and find out who pays attention to what media. Find out which newspaper columnists, for example, are most influential on public opinion.

In addition, pay attention to flyers, brochures, posters, billboards and other types of public promotional material.

Here's an example of how you might read one publication with an eye on opportunities. The November 2006 issue of the English-language magazine *Adoh!* had a cover story on the hosts of a very popular morning radio show.

Here is an excerpt from the article:

"...there are certain issues that can be addressed that people can relate to. Like the government not doing something or the rising cost of living. We try to touch a little politics. We don't want to, though." Shaq is quick to interject there, saying they have very clear boundaries as to what they want to take up and what they do not. We'll talk about the fact of the rising cost of living. We'll talk about the rising petrol prices, we'll talk about it. But we're not going to talk about things that people are actually fighting over."

This is useful information. Though this radio show isn't likely to do a story about pro-peace NGOs, they might be interested in receiving information about a dynamic youth group launching an attention-getting event around water issues or housing.

The same issue of *Adoh!* has a profile story on human smuggling from Sri Lanka, and an event notice for an art exhibit that includes paintings about damaging our environment. This magazine may be receptive to covering your organisation's story.

When you come across an article or story that indicates the media's interest in your issue area or NGOs in general, make some notes and do some research. For newspapers and magazines, get the names of the author and editor, and find out how you could contact them with a story idea. Brainstorm how you would write a news release that would capture their attention.

Here's another example: Sri Lanka's alternative newspaper, *Ravaya*, has provincial correspondents. Which reporters tend to cover stories closest to the issues focused on by your organisation? What angle or approach should your news release to this publication use in order to obtain coverage?

This same scrutiny and brainstorming can be applied when looking for free publicity possibilities in your local area.

The Sunday Leader ran a two-page spread Fighting for Survival: The Plight of the People, with some village-level, personal stories on how the conflict is affecting individuals and communities. If yours is a community-based organisations looking to promote awareness of under-reported atrocities, take note of the journalist's name, and where he or she is based. Start watching for his or her byline, to see what else he or she writes about.

Some Sri Lankan newspapers have weekend provincial editions. This means that they need more story ideas from each region for these issues. The Sunday Lanka Deepa, for example, publishes eight full newspaper pages for each province. That's a lot of potential media opportunity each week.

Newspaper event listings are also valuable. Colombo's 'Daily News', for example, has a page 3 'Daily News Events' column that publishes 25 to 50 word public service announcements for events such as a child abuse awareness workshop, or a walk protesting violence against women.

How have newspapers covered international social issue campaigns in the past? What opportunities might this suggest for your organisation and any upcoming international campaigns?

Leading up to and during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, Sri Lankan media – particularly newspapers – covered the issue extensively. *Life Magazine*, an insert in *The Leader*, did a full-page feature including a half-page 'Programs around the country' article. Make a note of the editor's name and contact info, and research future international social campaigns you may be able to connect to.

Some additional examples:

- SAT Mag, an insert in The Island newspaper, which also has a full-page "Stop violence against women" article, including a paragraph with references to increased incidence of violence against women during war and armed conflict.
- The Sunday Times has an entertainment/style magazine insert called The Mirror, which recently ran a full-page story on the launch of a 'Make Sri Lanka Disabled Friendly' campaign. Stay alert to these unlikely but potentially effective vehicles.
- If your organisation focuses on issues such as child rights, child abuse, or day care lobbying, consider publications aimed at children and parents. Sunday Observer has an insert magazine called Junior Observer. Who is the editor? What tone do stories take, and how might you write a press release to target this publication with your story?
- Satyn is a glossy, full-colour publication that calls itself 'Sri Lanka's leading women's magazine'. One of the lead stories in a recent issue focused on children's social issues, linking to World Children's Day. Timing your news release to correspond to an anniversary or large event, and making the direct connection to that event in the release, can dramatically improve your chances of coverage.
- In the same issue of Satyn, the CEO/Editor-in-chief wrote an editorial promoting peacebuilding. The issue also included a four-page article headlined "Press Freedom,

Journalists and Everything In Between.” This publication may be receptive to story ideas that other media may not.

- InterNews trains for and produces community radio. Local producers are always looking for current affairs stories. Find out who these local people are, and add them to your media list. Could your organisation produce a community radio program, using InterNews resources, about the issues you focus on? What could your content or programming consist of?
- Is there a telecentre or community multimedia centre in your region where you can access email and the Internet, and take free classes on how to use these resources?

## ***Media Opportunities and Gender***

Women should have equal opportunities to get their stories told, and to set the goals and priorities of their communities. A number of women who have taken Voices of Reconciliation workshops say they have increased self-confidence, in particular increased confidence in contacting media, and in initiating communication strategies.

As you are identifying opportunities to have your organisation’s stories communicated through the media, ensure that you involve women and men equally in the process. Train both women and men to be spokespeople for your organisation. Encourage the voices of women and men to be heard equally.

## ***Safety and Media Coverage***

In Sri Lanka, safety is a factor, and the risks to safety will be different for each organization. For example:

- Organisations engaged in pro-peace work may feel apprehensive about accusations that they want to divide the country.
- Organisations that have strong relationships with large international non-government organisations may be concerned about their personal safety because of the current media climate, where NGOs are frequently criticized.

- Some organisations find that whenever they do get media coverage, there are false accusations that they are trying to convert people to Christianity, to undermine local culture, or that they support the LTTE.

Your organisation may not want visibility in the media. That is a valid choice and it, too, is an important reason to have a communications plan. If a media call comes in requesting a public comment, your organisation must be prepared with a cohesive plan and a ready response to decline an invitation.

Even if you decide media coverage isn't necessary, you still may wish to communicate with your stakeholders (clients, financial supporters, partners, local community leaders) about your project.

## Module 9: Evaluation

How will you know how your communication plan is working? To answer that question, your organisation must answer these ones:

- What were our objectives? (If you have set specific, measurable and time-bound objectives, your evaluation process will likely be more straightforward.)
- Did we meet our objectives?
- What was our strategy? Did it work?
- What can we do to build on our successful strategies?
- What can we learn from unsuccessful strategies?
- What should we do differently next time?

One Sri Lankan organisation produces a questionnaire they call KAP (Knowledge Attitude Practice). People are asked to fill it out prior to participating in education sessions/communication initiatives, right afterwards, then weekly, then monthly. The results of this questionnaire allow the organisation to easily measure and track the success of its educational and communication activities.

### ***Measuring Success: Informal Research Methods***

Qualitative:

- Conduct in-depth interviews with key members of your organisation or your audience.
- A volunteer can conduct focus groups for you. Invite a dozen or so people to participate, serve them dinner, have the volunteer facilitate the discussion, take notes (or tape the conversation if you have any means to do so), and keep all information confidential.
- Use other groups' research and experience
- List questions on a flip chart, or read them out, at a group meeting, and ask people to take five minutes to answer them.
- Take your messages directly out to your audience. Go to a location where people gather, or shop, and show them creative materials. (This method works best when you are testing your messages or creative approaches; not as a way of evaluating the success of your communication plan.)

Quantitative:

- Conduct brief (no more than 10 minutes) telephone surveys of your members, donors, or audience
- If you produce a newsletter or annual report, include a brief survey that can be filled out and mailed back to you